

REVIEW: *A STEP AWAY FROM PARADISE*

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Thomas K. Shor. 2012. *A Step Away from Paradise: A Tibetan Lama's Extraordinary Journey to a Land of Immortality*. [Kindle version]. ASIN B006TR0Y7W (7.03USD); ISBN 0999291890 (paperback 19.95USD).

Tulshuk Lingpa was a visionary, and true visionaries are rare on this planet. They are able to bring down into form the great hopes and aspirations of us all. Think of a great musician or poet. They can capture in a few lines or notes the essence of what it means to be human. Everybody longs for wholeness. Why else do people search, be it for enlightenment or love.

– Thomas Shor²

Born in the USA, Thomas Shor travels in mountain regions, takes photographs, and writes about his experiences. He has authored *Windblown Clouds* (2003) and *The Master Director* (2014).³ The title under review focuses on Tulshuk Lingpa⁴ (Brtul zhugs gling pa, 1916-1962), a charismatic *terton* 'treasure revealer', who claimed to be able to open the hidden land - Beyul Demoshong.

The author was fascinated by the account of Tulshuk Lingpa's disciple, Dorje Wangmo, a Bhutanese nun and a disciple who abandoned her worldly possessions to pursue the land of dreams and imagined paradise. The author dug deeper by interviewing Kungsang, Tulshuk Lingpa's son, and other key disciples who were participants in the search of the same hidden realm on the slope of a glacier. Elements of this tale resemble magical realism with its narration detailing participants' experiences of magic, a parallel world, and a portal to the hidden land. The story centers on a continuing search for locating this

Konchok Gelek. 2018. Review: *A Step Away from Paradise*. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 51:346-350.

² <http://bit.ly/2Eu5WxI>, accessed 26 November 2017.

³ <http://thomasshor.com/Books.htm>, accessed 15 October 2017.

⁴ <http://bit.ly/2005HQm>, accessed 4 October 2017.

paradise with each step holding the possibility of drawing nearer to the destination. This holds readers' curiosity to the end.

In 1962, Tulshuk Lingpa led 300 followers from Sikkim and Bhutan to an adjacent area along the Nepal-Sikkim border. He then took a few close disciples to Kangchenjunga,¹ a remote area located on the border between Sikkim and Nepal, and attempted to pass through a gate that he believed led to a heavenly place, paralleling our own existence. At that moment, an avalanche enveloped them, killing Tulshuk and injuring the two others with him.

To better understand Tulshuk, background about his title, his lineage, and his belief is useful. Tulshuk Lingpa was a *terton*,² literally, 'treasure revealer' or 'mine excavator'. According to the author, *lingpa* is a title for elite *terton*:

A lingpa is a special type of Tibetan Lama who has the capacity to find terma, or hidden treasures. That explains his second name, Lingpa. Tulshuk means crazy. He was named this when he was eight years old. So, he must have shown the signs even as a boy. Tulshuk also means changeable or mutable. So, someone with a tulshuk nature will say one thing in the morning, another thing in the afternoon, and contradict both by evening. So, if you translate his name, it is Crazy Treasure Revealer.³

The *terton* tradition is found in the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism that traces back to Padmasambhava/Guru Rinpoche⁴ from India, credited with introducing tantric Buddhism into Tibet. Padmasambhava hid tantric scriptures and ritual objects in mountains, lakes, the sky, and even within certain people's minds to protect the Dharma when it was under attack, and appointed demons that had been subdued and spiritual beings as dharma-protectors to guard the hidden treasures until the time was ripe for their revelation.

Being a *terton* comes from a natural gift, an innate ability to find the hidden object. In the early twentieth century in a remote region of Golok, Tibet, Tulshuk Lingpa demonstrated this quality while

¹ <http://bit.ly/2sIhlAI>, accessed 4 October 2017.

² <http://bit.ly/2BleOyx>, accessed 15 October 2017.

³ <http://bit.ly/2Eu5WxI>, accessed 26 November 2017.

⁴ <http://bit.ly/2EudG2F>, accessed 15 October 2017.

very young. He grabbed a *phurba*, a ritual dagger with a pointed three-edge blade,¹ from the empty space of air above him in front of monk novices and his teacher.

Tulshuk Lingpa's father was also a *terton* with two wives, a common practice among *lingpa*. The second wife was a dakini 'sky goer', a female embodiment of enlightened energy, intermediaries between the hidden land and *lingpa*.

In the 1930s, when Tulshuk Lingpa was teaching at a monastery adjacent to Chongay Town in Central Tibet, he met Phuntsok Choeden from a nearby household. They fell in love and ran away together to India. While on pilgrimage to places that Padmasambhava had once visited, they found themselves in a Himalayan region of India. Tulshuk Lingpa used his knowledge of herbal medicine in tandem with ritual and magic to treat the local people. He was then invited to a monastery in the Pangi Valley in the Chamba District in India, where he lived for fifteen years.

At times Tulshuk acted insanely, was unpredictable, contradicted his own statements, and often drank. Nevertheless, his ability to locate *ter* proved he was a *terton*. For example, one night when he was drunk while circumambulating a temple, he ordered his disciples to smash a wall of the temple, revealing a scroll with some writing that only a *terton* could decipher. He later produced two books of some 300 pages each based on his interpretation of this *ter*.

His fame grew in the Pandi Area in the west Himalayan region of India and he acted as a judge when there were local disputes. When well-armed Muslims entered the adjacent village, Kaan, people feared that Pandi would be the next target. Tulshuk Lingpa performed a ritual to stop the intrusion, and then he and a few of his disciples went to Kaan Village, which seemed abandoned. In fact, anxious villagers were hiding inside their homes. The intruders had left. Villagers cheered with joy when they realized the invaders were gone, put garlands of flowers around his neck, and regarded Tulshuk Lingpa as their savior. To prevent a return of the invaders, Tulshuk Lingpa performed rituals for some days. The Muslims did not return.

¹ A *phurba* is "a ritual dagger with a pointed three-edge blade, such as that held by the deity" (<http://bit.ly/2CchCju>, accessed 15 October 2017).

Residents of Simoling 'place of the female cannibal', Kaan's neighboring village, had a number of lepers. Locals believed that unknown creatures were feeding on people's flesh. Tulshuk Lingpa performed ten days of healing rituals and then ordered village men to fire their hunting rifles into the air to chase those demons to Afghanistan. Tulshuk believed the cause of the disease was that villagers cut trees that grew near springs. There were no new cases of leprosy after the ritual. Tulshuk Lingpa's reputation continued to grow and many came to him for healing.

After his death, his body was cremated. Some of Tulshuk's followers returned to a more ordinary normal life while others continued their spiritual journey. Wangchuk, a sponsor of Tulshuk Lingpa, asserted that his grandson was the incarnation of Tulshuk Lingpa based on the boy's claims. The reincarnated boy beat his parents, used drugs, dropped out of school, lacked money to live, and eventually became a taxi driver. The author eventually meets the reincarnated Tulshuk Lingpa, Raju, who was in his late thirties and had a wife and two children.

The book features two story lines. One is the author's journey which describes what he sees, who he meets, what he hears, and where he goes. The other stream is the story of Tulshuk Lingpa, which is based on what the author learned over time. These two streams seem randomly interwoven, which may puzzle readers. Better organization, for example, putting events in chronological order, would have made a clearer, more easily understood story.

Those interested in "oriental mysticism," Buddhism, journeys to unknown worlds, and oral history collected from real people's lived experiences will find this book of great interest.

Don't listen to anybody. Decide by yourself and practice madness. Develop courage for the benefit of all sentient beings. Then you will automatically be free from the knot of attachment. Then you will continually have the confidence of fearlessness and you can then try to open the Great Door of the Hidden Place.

— Tulshuk Lingpa¹

¹<http://bit.ly/2Eu5WxI>, accessed 26 November 2017.

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- Shor, Thomas K. 2014. *The Master Director: A Journey Through Politics, Doubt & Devotion with a Himalayan Master*. Noida: Harper Element.
- _____. 2003. *Windblown Clouds*. Escape Media.

NON-ENGLISH TERMS

- Beyul Demoshong, sbas yul bde mo gzhung བུ་བླ་ལ་བདེ་མོ་གཞུང་།
 Chatral Rinpoche, bya bral rin po che ཐུ་བླ་ལ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ།
 Chimi Wangmo, 'chi med dbang mo འཆི་མེད་དབང་མོ།
 Dorje Wangmo, rdo rje dbang mo རོ་རྩེ་དབང་མོ།
 Dudjom Rinpoche, bdud 'joms rin po che བདད་འཛམ་ལ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ།
 Gelong Tenzin, dge slong bstan 'dzin དགེ་སློང་བསྟན་འཛིན།
 Geluk, dge lugs དགེ་ལུགས།
 Kandro Yeshe Tsogyal, 'mkha' 'gro ye shes mtsho rgyal མཁའ་འགྲོ་ཡེ་ཤེས་མཚོ་
 རྒྱལ།
 Kungsang, kun bzang ཀུན་བཟང་།
 Padmasambhava, pad+ma sam b+ha ba པདྨ་སམ་བུ་བ།
 Pema Cheokyi, pad+ma chos skyid པདྨ་ཆོས་སྒྲིད།
 phurba, phur ba ཕུར་པ།
 Rigzin Godmchen, rig 'dzin sgom chen རིག་འཛིན་སྒྲོམ་ཆེན།
 Simoling, srin mo gling སིན་མོ་གླིང་།
 Tashiding, bkra shis gdan བཀྲ་ཤིས་གདན།
 terma, gter ma གཏེར་མ།
 terton, gter ston གཏེར་སྟོན།
 Tulshuk Lingpa, brtul zhugs gling pa བུཊུལ་ཞུགས་གླིང་པ།